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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: DRUG AND CRIME UPDATE

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11. SUMMARY: Drug seizures in Kazakhstan increased by 75% during the first quarter of 2009 while drug-related crimes dropped almost 2%. Prime Minister Masimov criticized law enforcement efforts to combat drug trafficking and called for the establishment of an interagency unit to arrest government officials tied to drug traffickers. END SUMMARY.

STATISTICS

12. According to government statistics, the number of drug-related crimes during the first quarter of 2009 dropped 1.6% to 2,871. The number of people involved in drug-related crimes also dropped, from 1,863 to 1,761. In total, law enforcement agencies seized over 2.5 metric tons of drugs, a 75.3% increase from the same period last year. The seized drugs include over 2 metric tons of marijuana, 221 kilos of hashish, 238 kilos of heroin, and 1.25 kilos of opium. The total number of registered drug addicts dropped slightly from 55,781 to 54,868. More than 62% (33,975) were users of heroin and opium and nearly 22% (11,867) were users of marijuana and hashish. The number of female addicts dropped 3.6% to 4,598 and the number of underage addicts decreased 7.8%. An estimated 1,500 people died of drug overdoses last year.

13. On April 9, Zhanat Suleimenov, newly appointed Chairman of the Committee on Combating Drugs (KBN) of the Ministry of Interior (MVD), reported on the MVD's accomplishments during the first quarter of 2009. The MVD disrupted drug rings operated by nine organized criminal groups, detected over 1,600 drug-related crimes, and stopped 23 drug-trafficking attempts. The MVD seized more than 1.3 metric tons of narcotics during the first quarter, a five-fold increase from the same period last year. The Committee for National Security (KNB) shut down 18 drug routes and six criminal groups. Over the three month period, the KNB seized 150 kilos of heroin.

14. Over the last five years, over two thousand foreign citizens were detained for drug trafficking, including 836 from Russia, 719

from Kyrgyzstan, 602 from Uzbekistan, 79 from Tajikistan, 42 from Turkmenistan, and 26 from Ukraine.

CURRENT PROBLEMS...

15. As early as October 2008, President Nazarbayev voiced concerns about the possibility of increased crime due to the financial crisis and tasked the MVD with ensuring public order and combating organized crime and drug trafficking. Though there has been an increase in unemployment, there has not been a significant increase in crime. Many though continue to fear that unemployed construction workers -- a group which includes a large number of migrants from neighboring countries -- will join criminal gangs.

16. There are many factors which make Kazakhstan vulnerable to drug trafficking, including measures to expedite the import and export of licit goods, poorly equipped borders, and the presence of large cities near the borders. It is suspected that traffickers are increasingly using the TIR (UN Convention on International Transit) system to transport narcotics in seemingly sealed trucks. Traffickers are also heavily relying on the rail system to transit through Kazakhstan. During the past year, many seizures of narcotics from Afghanistan were made on Kazakhstan's border with Russia. Border guards, customs officers, and police continue to use mobile patrols for operations in the south in response to this problem.

17. Funding for law enforcement has been insufficient. Initially 16.8 billion tenge (150 tenge = \$1) was allocated for counter-narcotics programs through 2011. However this amount was cut by 93% in August 2008, leaving only 1.2 billion tenge. The 225 million tenge allocated to the MVD for anti-narcotics programs in 2009 was reduced by 45 million.

...AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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18. On March 31, Prime Minister Masimov proposed the establishment of a special interagency unit under either the MVD or the KNB to ferret out law enforcement and government officials with ties to narco-trafficking. The Prime Minister has a renewed interest in stopping narco-trafficking after having apparently been informed by his Russian counterpart that trafficking through Kazakhstan could threaten the establishment of the Customs Union with Russia and Belarus.

19. Nurgali Belisbekov, Deputy Head of the KNB, proposed securing the southern border in a similar manner to the Kazakhstani-Chinese border, with a secured green zone between countries. Currently there is no green zone between Kazakhstan and its neighbors in the south, allowing for a great deal of undetected, illegal movement over the borders. Belisbekov also suggested designating certain checkpoints on the Kyrgyz border only for passengers or cargo -- the Korday checkpoint would handle cargo and the Karasu checkpoint passengers. Customs Control Committee Chairman Kozy-Korpesh Karbuzov reported at the same meeting that there are 41 roads on which one can cross the Kazakhstani-Kyrgyz border without crossing a checkpoint. (NOTE: Post has previously heard of a similar number of crossing points on the border with Uzbekistan. END NOTE.)

110. Kazakhstani law enforcement continues to improve its relationship with its neighbors in order to better fight narco-trafficking. The KNB has been working with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan both bilaterally and as members of the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center (CARICC). Kazakhstan has also strengthened cooperation with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and China. For example, China and Kazakhstan conducted the Safari-Transit Operation, during which eighteen Nigerian traffickers were arrested.

111. The MVD Counternarcotics Committee (KBN) reported that the use of controlled deliveries (operations used to identify traffickers and their routes) has been very successful. In 2008, the KBN conducted 29 special operations, including 12 international operations. Five of the operations were conducted jointly with the

Kyrgyzstan and Russia and two with Tajikistan. These controlled delivery operations resulted in a seizure of 689 kilos, including 89 kilos of heroin.

¶12. CARICC is also doing much to increase cooperation and is helping to organize joint operations, including controlled delivery operations. The Center is also organizing the collection and analysis of information. On March 22, the Agreement on Establishment of CARICC entered into force. CARICC is available on the internet at www.caricc.org.

¶13. The first meeting of CARICC's National Coordinators Council was held on February 26, during which a list of activities for the next two years was drawn up. The Council expressed its willingness to grant observer status to France, Finland, Italy, the United States, and Interpol. The Council also appointed Kazakhstan's Interior Minister to be Chairman of the Council. Beksultan Sarsekov, CARICC Director, stated that CARICC will analyze the drug situation in the region and propose improvements of national legislation and implementation of drug demand reduction measures, working with civil society and drug treatment centers.

NEW ROUTES

¶14. With the Border Guard Service focused on strengthening the Kazakhstani-Uzbek border, some traffickers moved to the Kazakhstani-Kyrgyz border. A joint Kazakhstani-Kyrgyz operation blocked a route between the two countries and found many more drug mules swallowing heroin. During the operation, law enforcement officers found 200 5-gram packets in an apartment in Bishkek. Two Kyrgyzstanis and two Azerbaijanis, some believed to be at the head of the drug ring, were arrested.

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¶15. One of the main trafficking routes through Kazakhstan and Russia transits Almaty, Karaganda, Semey, Novosibirsk, Barnaul, and Omsk.

¶16. According to the MVD, a kilo of heroin that costs \$700 in Afghanistan goes up to \$1,500 on the Afghan-Tajik border, and to \$4,000 in Kazakhstan. On the Kazakhstani-Russian border that same kilo can cost \$20,000, increase to \$25,000 in Russia, and ultimately be sold for over \$30,000 in Europe.

SELECTED SEIZURES

¶17. The Division on Combating Drugs of the Zhambyl Department of Interior arrested a group attempting to barter 835 grams of high-quality Afghan heroin. The heroin, stamped with "999" attesting to its quality, was offered to clients in a shoe box in exchange for a \$26,000 SUV.

¶18. On January 26, customs officials on at the Zhanazhol checkpoint in the North Kazakhstan Oblast seized 51 kilos of heroin and 110 kilos of hashish discovered with both a scanner and a canine. The narcotics were hidden in the deck of a car transport truck traveling from Kyrgyzstan to Lithuania. The follow-up investigation revealed that the Kyrgyz driver was paid \$10,000 to transport the drugs to Moscow. The driver was carrying fraudulent identity documents and was wanted in Russia for the transportation of five kilos of hashish in Tatarstan.

¶19. On February 4, a drug-sniffing dog found 3.97 kilos of heroin and 21.4 kilos of hashish in a vehicle crossing through the Korday checkpoint on the Kyrgyzstan border.

¶20. On February 8, border guards at the Sypatai Batyr section detained two Kyrgyzstanis carrying 32 kilos of heroin.

¶21. On February 6, officers at an internal checkpoint outside of Astana stopped a vehicle transporting 18 kilos of heroin and 7 kilos of hashish into Astana.

¶22. On February 11, border guards arrested a Kazakhstani attempting to smuggle 23 kilos of heroin into Russia through the Uba checkpoint

in eastern Kazakhstan. The drugs, first detected by a canine and then found using an endoscope, were in twelve two-liter plastic bottles in a vehicle's gas tank.

123. On March 30, police in Taraz in Zhambyl Oblast arrested a marijuana producer in his apartment. The police seized equipment, 40 kilos of marijuana, and seven kilo of hashish from the apartment. The producer faces 10 to 15 years in prison.

124. On April 6, police working at the Kyzyltu internal checkpoint in South Kazakhstan Oblast arrested a Russian with one kilo of heroin taped to his body.

CORRUPTION

125. Three cases of police involvement in drug-crimes were reported during the first quarter of 2009. The Aktobe Department of the KNB, working jointly with the KNB in the Mangystau Oblast, arrested five people transporting 44.6 kilos of marijuana. One member of the group is an MVD officer in the Aktobe Oblast.

126. A police officer in the Almaty Oblast, who was Head of the Criminal Police in the town of Tekeli, was distributing drugs through his girlfriend. She was arrested in October and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. The officer fled and is being actively sought by police.

127. Customs officers at the Kyzylzhar post in North Kazakhstan Oblast were providing previously seized narcotics to "false couriers" in order to improve their seizure statistics. One customs officer at the same post was video-taped by the KNB exchanging

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narcotics for tires and other goods.

HOAGLAND